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Title: Dealing with Flattery

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I do not wish to leave out an important branch of this subject, for it is a danger from which GMs are with difficulty preserved, unless they are very careful and discriminating. It is that of flatterers, of whom courts are full, because men are so self-complacent in their own affairs, and in a way so deceived in them, that they are preserved with difficulty from this pest, and if they wish to defend themselves they run the danger of falling into contempt. Because there is no other way of guarding oneself from flatterers except letting men understand that to tell you the truth does not offend you; but when every one may tell you the truth, respect for you abates.

Therefore a wise leader ought to hold a third course by choosing the wise men in his state, and giving to them only the liberty of speaking the truth to him, and then only of those things of which he inquires, and of none others; but he ought to question them upon everything, and listen to their opinions, and afterwards form his own conclusions. With these councillors, separately and collectively, he ought to carry himself in such a

way that each of them  
should know that, the  
more freely he shall  
speak, the more he shall  
be preferred; outside of  
these, he should listen to  
no one, pursue the thing  
resolved on, and be  
steadfast in his  
resolutions. He who does  
otherwise is either  
overthrown by flatterers,  
or is so often changed  
by varying opinions that  
he falls into contempt.

A GM, therefore, ought  
always to take counsel,  
but only when he wishes  
and not when others wish;  
he ought rather to  
discourage every one from  
offering advice unless he  
asks it; but, however, he  
ought to be a constant  
inquirer, and afterwards a  
patient listener concerning  
the things of which he  
inquired; also, on learning  
that any one, on any  
consideration, has not told  
him the truth, he should  
let his anger be felt.

And if there are some  
who think that a leader  
who conveys an impression  
of his wisdom is not so  
through his own ability,  
but through the good  
advisers that he has  
around him, beyond doubt  
they are deceived, because  
this is an axiom which  
never fails: that a GM  
who is not wise himself  
will never take good  
advice, unless by chance  
he has yielded his affairs  
entirely to one person  
who happens to be a very  
prudent man. In this case  
indeed he may be well  
governed, but it would  
not be for long, because  
such a governor would in  
a short time take away  
his state from him.

But if a leader who is not experienced should take counsel from more than one he will never get united counsels, nor will he know how to unite them. Each of the counsellors will think of his own interests, and the GM will not know how to control them or to see through them. And they are not to be found otherwise, because men will always prove untrue to you unless they are kept honest by constraint. Therefore it must be inferred that good counsels, whencesoever they come, are born of the wisdom of the leader, and not the wisdom of the leader from good counsels.